

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH AZZA HUMADI, PROGRAM DIRECTOR,
WOMEN'S ADVOCATE INITIATIVE, GULF REGION DIVISION, VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM IRAQ
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LINDY KYZER (Army Public Affairs): Again, this is Lindy Kyzer with
Army Public Affairs. Thank you so much, Gulf Region Corps of Engineers, for
taking the time to do this. We are experiencing an echo. It's bearable at this
point, but just bear with us and do apologize for the phone issues that we're
having this morning.

Thank you again. It's a really exciting topic. I'm thrilled to learn
more about it. I'll turn it over to you all for opening remarks and
introduction to the program and what the Women's Advocate Initiative is.

MR. : Azza Humadi, who is Director of the Women's Advocate
Initiative here at Gulf Region Division.

MS. HUMADI: My name is Azza Humadi. Good morning, everyone in the
States. I am an Iraqi American and the -- (inaudible) -- complete four years
in the same program. The women's program started in early January -- actually
focused on helping the Iraqi women and Iraqi businesswomen to win contracts with
the U.S. Government.

It's actually -- (inaudible) -- having equal opportunities --
(inaudible) -- and jobs within the reconstruction process. It's also -- we
should establish a database that has all the women and we will help them through
sessions and seminars to teach them on how to do contracting and how to fill
forms with the help of the -- (inaudible) -- joint command contracting.

We organize the meetings and this is how it started, successfully after
four years, we have to admit that we have succeeded in having a large amount of
businesswomen working in Iraq and today, I have three ladies with me, two of
them -- (inaudible) -- they came all the way over at six o'clock in the evening
-- (inaudible) -- and also it's my honor to introduce Lieutenant Commander
Sandra Rodriguez-Brown who would be also accompanying from the -- (inaudible).

MS. KYZER: Excellent. Thank you so much for those opening comments.
Is there anything else or can we go directly to questions?

MS. HUMADI: I would like to refer to the benefit of those conferences
that we organize on monthly basis or every bimonthly basis. It's also --
(inaudible) -- contracting officers, as well as U.S. companies who are working
in Iraq, and also it is so healthy that when they get -- (inaudible) --

challenges or whatever comments they have, we can raise them up and we can solve, move to a better solution for those issues.

So these are the benefits of having the meetings and conferences. I don't know, maybe later if you want we can talk about the statistics and the numbers. It's up to you.

MS. KYZER: Absolutely -- (inaudible) -- presentation slides that you provided so they have that information that you wanted to go over any of that. Absolutely.

MS. HUMADI: Excellent.

MS. KYZER: Go ahead.

MS. HUMADI: Hello?

MS. KYZER: Yes. We'll go ahead and take questions now. If there's any way we can do it -- (inaudible) -- I really appreciate it.

MR. : I don't have any problem dealing with it. I'm in the military, so I understand frustrations.

MR. : We're back. I hope we have a better line now. MS. KYZER: I do apologize for the technical issues; we've tried several phone lines, so it's definitely some kind of an internal issue, I'm not sure how to try different phones. It just seems to still be a slight echo.

MR. : Better.

MR. : Well, if the folks from Baghdad would bear with us if we ask them to repeat themselves, I think we can probably manage.

MS. KYZER: Okay. Well, we'll go ahead and proceed. Are we okay to take questions now?

MS. HUMADI: I think we are ready to take questions.

MS. KYZER: Okay, and we'll start with Laughing Wolf. Did you have a question?

Q Hold on. Sorry, I had an interruption here.

What I would like to see if some of the ladies who have come in tonight to talk to us would care to expand a little bit on their personal experiences with the program and how things have worked for them.

MARY TERESE MARROW: Hello, I'm Mary Terese Marrow -- (inaudible) -- Iraqi company, 100 percent Iraqi company. Actually, this program helps women a lot. It's really made a transition, a difference for women. As a proof for it -- (inaudible) -- so we did a lot of work for myself. I got my first contract in 2006 by the help of Azza through networking and it was delivering -- (inaudible) -- trainers to -- (inaudible) -- locations in Iraq and then I started taking other contracts.

Currently, I'm doing vocational training for about 650 trainees with 100 trainers. It is a very interesting contract project and let us say three or

four projects in one project because the trainees are getting stipends and they are getting training and we are rehabilitating a lot of buildings in one of -- it was one of the more -- (inaudible) -- in Baghdad and you know, this project -- (inaudible) -- work together -- (inaudible).

MS. HUMADI: I have to add something, I was just mentioning to Colonel Rodriguez that the Iraqi businesswoman is different than the other Iraqi women, I'm talking only about Iraq because they are -- (inaudible) -- who are really educated, you know, like the lady just spoke is an environmental engineer, so they all have degrees and they're all focused in what they're doing. They come to the meetings and, you know, I always mention that when you have credibility, you know, when you win the credibility of those people, they trust you and they believe in you and all of them here have won contracts and I think it's going very well and it's expanding with the help of GCCI, of course. MR. : Can Colonel Rodriguez-Brown explain what the contracting program is about because that's really a very important part of this story. Nothing happens -- (inaudible) -- you have the priorities set for this program and she can speak to that if she'd be interested. LIEUTENANT COLONEL SANDRA RODRIGUEZ-BROWN: Hi, I'm Lieutenant Colonel Rodriguez-Brown with -- (inaudible) -- I'm sure we're warmer than you are.

MR. : I hope so.

LT. COL. RODRIGUEZ-BROWN: Basically, the mission of -- (inaudible) -- Women's Business Initiative Program is to expand our host nation business advocate training program -- (inaudible) -- on how the contracting process works, make them competitive -- (inaudible) -- contracting, construction -- (inaudible).

So having said that, right now, we have over 1,800 -- (inaudible) -- women contractors and since 2005, more than \$6 million -- (inaudible) -- over \$187 million. So you can see the impact that our training has provided to the Iraqi women and these women are professionals -- (inaudible) -- engineers to -- (inaudible) -- everything you find in the States, you find here. So it's just a matter of the women coming to our -- (inaudible) -- want to take a chance -- (inaudible) -- and learn the process.

So that's what we do for the women. We're making progress and going to continue -- (inaudible) -- the program and get a lot of positive feedback -- (inaudible) -- and so having said that, I'll turn it over for any questions you might have of me -- (inaudible).

MS. KYZER: Chuck, did you have a question?

Q Yes, I do. This is Chuck Simmons from America's North Shore Journal.

I wanted to ask the Iraqi ladies about the differences for women in business now as compared to when Saddam was still in power? And also are they able to leverage their business to outside of Iraq? Are they growing regionally?

MS. HUMADI: -- (inaudible).

ENTISAR AL TAE: -- (inaudible) -- businesswomen here and I'm looking always forward to -- (inaudible) -- experience, and so -- (inaudible) -- ability or opportunity to work side-by-side with the men and it was actually

almost impossible to work with them, but after 2003 -- (inaudible) -- working with the -- (inaudible) -- interpreter and then became a contractor -- (inaudible) -- and it was a very great opportunity for me to -- (inaudible) -- after this, the women are now more developed, more professionalism and -- (inaudible) -- companies expand -- (inaudible) -- to the men -- (inaudible) -- start something.

So we started after 2003 and now we are -- (inaudible) -- much easier than dealing with men. Doing business with women is more professional -- (inaudible) -- than working with men and so -- (inaudible) -- and the security -- (inaudible) -- are better. So this is -- (inaudible) -- for the women to work in. It wasn't like this before and -- (inaudible) -- in 2006 it was really dangerous and now it's better and -- (inaudible) -- for the future -- (inaudible) -- more security, more business opportunities for women who take part -- (inaudible) -- in society -- (inaudible) -- zero for women to work in and now it's like 50 percent of the women and hopefully in the future, 100 percent of the women -- (inaudible) -- more space for women to do what they -- (inaudible) -- and they want to show -- (inaudible) -- and we are here -- (inaudible) -- whatever we can, professional ladies.

MR. : I think the other half of Chuck's question was expanding business beyond the borders of Iraq. Do you know of anybody involved in the program who has been able to move their coffers outside the country?

LT. COL. RODRIGUEZ-BROWN: I could add, this is Lieutenant Rodriguez-Brown here. One of our new initiatives is -- (inaudible) -- and that's going to allow key companies to form partnerships with more companies and so that -- (inaudible) -- based in the U.S., they can form a partnership with an Iraqi company, the same thing with an Iraqi company, they can form a partnership with an American company or a German company. As the new initiative that's coming, so we're continuing to develop that program and I'm sure that women contractors will take advantage of that -- (inaudible).

MS. HUMADI: -- (inaudible) -- with Americans.

MR. : Go ahead and respond to that.

MS. HUMADI: I just said that we do have two companies; we already have joint ventures with companies because I work also with the -- (inaudible) -- embassy and -- (inaudible) -- do have companies that are looking for joint ventures. So we look for the best and -- (inaudible) -- Iraqi women.

MR. : -- (inaudible) -- answer your question, would you like one of the other women to respond to the first half of your question?

MR. : If one of the other women has a story, yeah, that would be great. (Cross talk.)

MR. : You know, that same thing would happen in the United States with women?

MS. : (Inaudible.) I work in Ramadi; I work in Diyala -- (inaudible).

MS. : (Inaudible.)

MS. : (Inaudible.) I work in a pretty hot area, very dangerous.
-- (inaudible).

MR. : (Inaudible.) Do business as -- (inaudible) -- when Hussein was in power?

MS. HUMADI: Yes. Actually, since I graduated in 1978 and until 1994, I was an electrical engineer -- (inaudible). I was an employee in the Iraqi government. I got good experience, but -- (inaudible) -- employee in the Iraqi government -- (inaudible) -- working with the Americans -- (inaudible) -- I was looking for -- (inaudible) -- and now I'm really employing a -- (inaudible) -- not only me, but my employees also are enjoying this work.

It is interesting to work with the Americans. You may ask me why -- (inaudible) -- 24 hours -- (inaudible).

MR. : I thought that since we just talked a little bit about working in a hot area and we're not referring to the temperature -- (inaudible) -- but we're talking about -- (inaudible) -- I was wondering if you might be willing to share some information if there's interest in it, just about -- kind of the courage and pluck some of these women need to operate businesses because it's not like doing business on Main Street any town USA and the security is improving.

Azza, could you kind of summarize what you've learned from some of the women you are working with about the security and the challenges that they face?

MS. HUMADI: I shared with them -- (inaudible) -- part of my life. I just had an incident before I come to this meeting where one of the women called me, another woman called her to invite her to a meeting for businesswomen and -- (inaudible) -- so we go through issues with them on a daily basis and we have to make sure that they are safe -- (inaudible) -- secure.

I think I learned a lot from -- (inaudible) -- I established a great relationship with them and they mean so much to me. I don't know how -- (inaudible) -- you create this great friendship, relations between you and them, as well as they are equal. I don't have -- (inaudible) -- colleague or relative -- (inaudible). The challenges they go through is a lot. I think there are very courageous women. I had times in my life when -- (inaudible) -- conferences in 2006 and 2007 where the threat was on a daily basis and yet they show up, they come and I'm amazed -- (inaudible) -- but they're always eager to learn.

They're always eager to meet contracting officers and to establish work relationships with them and I think now it's a good time -- (inaudible) -- elections at the end of the month, but I think after that things will hopefully calm down. This is the challenges they go through a lot -- (inaudible) -- I just got -- (inaudible) -- do good work and -- (inaudible) -- they come back to me always because they don't know any other person that has been here for four years except me.

(Cross talk.)

MS. HUMADI: I tried -- (inaudible) -- but because of the situation, they get scared -- (inaudible) -- so we go through that on a daily basis -- (inaudible) -- at least several times a month, but overall, I think, we're doing very well -- (inaudible).

MR. : Another interesting part about life here in Iraq and this program looking at social issues and Azza, you were telling me a story about someone you know who was a widow, you know --

MS. HUMADI: Yes.

MR. : And so there are a lot of women here that are without husbands, husbands had perished. Can we talk about --

MS. HUMADI: Yeah, yeah, actually when we want to engage the government because several times -- (inaudible) -- government should acknowledge -- (inaudible) -- and every time -- (inaudible) -- NGOs and -- (inaudible) -- completed by a woman -- (inaudible) -- they are also doing work there -- (inaudible) -- and you need to come and see them and the -- (inaudible) -- she will come next week. She took her kids to Jordan. Her husband was assassinated in 2003 and she has four girls and one of them has Down Syndrome and yet she has been doing excellent, excellent work and maybe I can invite her some other time -- (inaudible) -- to speak at conferences -- (inaudible).

MR. : Well, we've been -- (inaudible) -- for a little bit, perhaps somebody else has a question you'd like to ask of these ladies.

MS. KYZER: Yes. CJ, do you have a question? CJ, or anybody who hasn't asked a question yet or anyone? Q One final question, if I may, this is Laughing Wolf from Black Five. Are there any figures on how many companies may have gotten a start through some of the micro grants?

LT. COL. RODRIGUEZ-BROWN: The micro grants are handled by the State Department through the Provincial Reconstruction Teams.

Q Yes, I understand, but I wondered if any of those that got started had graduated into your program?

LT. COL. RODRIGUEZ-BROWN: They are completely different projects because the State Department has their own grants and micro grants programs that they do when they fund projects, so we don't have this ability on that.

MS. KYZER: Okay. Are there any other questions from the bloggers on the line?

MR. : We were talking about contracts with the coalition forces and the Americans. Are these ladies getting contracts from the Iraqi government as well?

(Cross talk.)

MS. HUMADI: The women that we work with and we meet on a monthly basis would rather work with the U.S. because -- (inaudible) -- first of all, their names are secured. The second thing is that their money is well secured. They get paid on time. But when they compete -- (inaudible).

MS. MARROW: I could do business with the Iraqi ministry, I would not put myself into -- (inaudible) -- night before -- (inaudible) -- so that's why -- (inaudible) -- 2003.

MR. : So if I understand you, you're waiting for the Iraqi government to prove that it is not corrupt? Well, you know, the Americans are dealing with you fairly?

MR. : Several steps beyond what I just heard discussed.

LT. COL. RODRIGUEZ-BROWN: Lieutenant Colonel Rodriguez-Brown here. The women that do business with one -- (inaudible) -- bidding on U.S. government contracts. How the Iraqi government handles their contracts, we're not really familiar to that and -- (inaudible) -- on their part.

MR. : Okay.

LT. COL. RODRIGUEZ-BROWN: (Inaudible.)

MR. : The set up and the structure of this program exists to do business with Americans and coalition people. That's the foundation of it. So what you're suggesting, basically, if you're going to be doing business with the Iraqi government, that's looking at a whole new market and I think what's happening here is that there's focus on commerce with the American government.

MR. : All right. Thank you.

MS. HUMADI: And the Iraqi government has not given up such opportunities like making meetings and doing training, how to bid on contracts, how to network, because -- (inaudible).

MR. : Are there any other questions?

MS. KYZER: I don't think we have any other questions for the bloggers on the line. Would you like to give some closing remarks?

MR. : Do you want to give some closing remarks, Azza?

MS. HUMADI: I actually wanted to take this opportunity to thank the ladies on behalf of myself and all in the room for coming all the way and attending and making this program a success because without them, we are not here. And I want to thank you all for your time and for your interest in the program, and I hope that the future will hold better -- (inaudible).

Thank you.

MS. KYZER: Thank you so much. We do absolutely thank the women for making sure they were available. I so, so apologize for the technical difficulties.

I would highly encourage some of those Iraqi businesswomen to start a conference call phone service because I will absolutely be shopping around as this is terrible.

(Cross talk.)

MS. HUMADI: We are trying.

MS. KYZER: So if you have a proposal for me, get my e-mail address.

MS. HUMADI: -- (inaudible).

LT. COL. RODRIGUEZ-BROWN: So we have one more lady that wants to make one more comment.

MS. KYZER: Okay.

MS. : I want to thank Colonel Rodriguez-Brown for coming up here for being interested with women issues here and I would like to thank my mom -- (inaudible) -- because she's always taking care of us -- (inaudible). She called me earlier and -- (inaudible) -- taking care of my women, she's speaking about herself. So we are her women. We will always do. She's a great lady and thanks again.

(Cross talk.)

MR. : Thank you for taking an interest in the women's program here at Gulf Region Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

MS. KYZER: Thank you so much again. Thanks for the bloggers who dialed in. We will have a transcript from this, I hope, so that should help in terms of clarity and getting the information out. Ladies, Gulf Region Corps of Engineers, thank you, thank you very much for your time. I can assure you that the story did get out there, even in echo and two times for messaging.

Thank you very much.

END.